CLASSIC ROCK PRESENTS

2018

20th BIRTHDAY ISSUE

THE ULTIMATE REVIEW OF THE YEAR

As *Classic Rock* celebrates its 20th birthday, it's been another fantastic 12 months for rock'n'roll. There have been brilliant albums, awesome songs, amazing shows and more. Join us as we celebrate the year in rock in the company of some of those who made it great.

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20TH BIRTHDAY SPECTACULAR!

★CLASSIC★ ROCK

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CLUTCH **IRON MAIDEN** MANIC STREET PREACHERS
JOE BONAMASSA STEVE PERRY **THIN LIZZY** *& more!*

FUTURE
ISSUE 257

"Go out on top. Don't leave it until some young punk knocks you out"

Kiss bassist **Gene Simmons** looks back on a year of booming business and ahead to the eventual Kiss retirement, and explains why Lady Gaga "is the only new rock star in the last twenty years".

Words: **Henry Yates**

Somewhere off the Florida coast, Gene Simmons is reclining on the deck of a cruise ship, watching the hordes of Kiss Kruise attendees and contemplating his lifelong status as "the luckiest guy in the world". After another year of razzmatazz and royalties, it would appear to be business as usual for the planet's most openly commercial band. But with Kiss set to bid farewell with their End Of The Road Tour from January, Simmons's world is about to change in a big way.

Aren't you going to miss all this when Kiss call it a day?

Well, the touring band will stop, certainly. But Kiss will continue in other ways. Let's just cut through all the bullshit. I'm sixty-nine now and this is a great time to go. I'm in great shape. I'm strong, singing better than ever. By the end of the tour I'll be seventy-two, maybe even older. In terms of pride and self-respect and admiration for the fans – and our legacy – why the fuck would I want to be there running around in a rocket-powered wheelchair? If I was doing what Sir Paul [McCartney] – who I greatly admire – is doing I could do it into my mid-seventies. Jagger, I have to say, works his ass off. That's a tip of the hat. But if you're wearing sneakers and a T-shirt, you can do this into your mid-seventies or later. We're the hardest-working band, and that means I carry around forty pounds of armour. And if Jagger, God bless him, got into my outfit he'd pass out in the first half-hour.

"Why the fk would I want to be running around in a rocket-powered wheelchair?"**

So you want to go out on a high?

Remember, we introduce ourselves: "You wanted the best, you got the best, the hottest band in the world." Why would we want to stay on stage a day longer than what we feel is legitimate? Those words have to mean something. We've all seen pathetic examples of bands who have come up and do sets and sit on chairs, because they can't stand up. I understand the need, the hunger, but [have some] self-respect and dignity, at least for the fans. When you're heavyweight champion of the world and you've knocked everybody out, go out on top, for God's sakes. Don't leave it until some young punk knocks you out, embarrassingly.

What about Kiss continuing as a studio band, though?

The cancer has pervaded and invaded the business. So everybody downloads and file-shares. Kiss is not a charity. I refuse to do something for free. There's private philanthropy. You get paid for doing what you're doing. I want to get paid too.

But don't you want to continue making records for artistic reasons?

No. I'd rather amass demos and do that kind of stuff, and every once in a while bring out the largest box set of all time.

Have you been impressed by any new bands this year?

No, I haven't seen anybody. Y'know, there are young bands that sound like Led Zeppelin. Years ago it was Black Keys. But nothing that makes you stand up and say: "Hold on there." The magic thing, especially in England, that happened is that Queen sounded different than Yes, who sounded different from Sabbath, and Zeppelin sounded like their own thing. They all sounded different and marched to the beat of their own drummer. They didn't look over their shoulder to find out what else was going on. I do like pop music a lot. ABBA is perhaps my favourite. When you look at Taylor Swift and all the other wonderful pop princesses, there's a formula. It is interchangeable songs, interchangeable stars. That goes for writing as well. It's interchangeable. But it wouldn't be a good idea for ABBA to do *Roundabout* by Yes, would it?

And that goes to what Mother Nature figured out a long time ago. Which is there's no other person on Earth like you. Your fingerprints make you completely individual. And what's missing is many new bands have the same fingerprint as the other bands. It's interchangeable.

By extension, are you saying you don't think it's been a good year for rock'n'roll?

Oh, it's horrific. And we've played this game before, perhaps. But it has to do with Napster and all the other ones that have just destroyed everything. Because they gave crack for free to young fans. They've trained them to download and file-share for free, without paying the artist who created it. 1958 until 1988 is thirty years. During that time, in all the genres of the music, you had The Beatles and Hendrix and the Stones and you can go on and on. Bowie and Prince and U2 and the heavy stuff, Iron Maiden and Metallica and all that. On and on. From 1988 until today – also thirty years – who's the new Beatles?

So you think digital platforms have impacted on the quality of bands?

No, I think the talent is there. Perhaps there's more talent than ever. Max Martin and the Swedish writers, those guys can write songs. But they can't form bands. So they have to keep writing pop songs for the young females, the pretty girls who can actually sell. Because there's that young female audience. And the boy bands sell well because it's their first boyfriends that these twelve-year-old girls are gonna get. And I'm all for that. I understand that. The Beatles started off with that. I get it. It's all great. It was great for The Monkees and on and on. But The Monkees didn't become The Beatles because they didn't write their own songs. And they didn't have a sense of identity. They were created. The Beatles was a real band. And we love the Foo Fighters, but that's an old band. They've been around over twenty years. I don't see a new band. Not because the talent is not out there. The Greta [Van Fleet] band is great and all that. But nobody's gonna get the chance we did, where a record company would give you millions of dollars, non-recoupable – in other >

Gene Simmons with Kiss at the Resurrection Fest music festival in Viveiro, Spain, July 2018.

words, for free. If the album was a bomb, you wouldn't have to give a penny back. What job lets you do that?

How will you fill your time if you're not touring with Kiss?
I have literally over 15 companies that are vying for my attention. Restaurant chains. A cannabis company. Real estate. There's barely enough time during the day to get through all of that.

What made you want to get involved with the cannabis business this year?
I changed my mind. I was dismissive and arrogant about everything based with drugs. When in fact, if you have a headache it's good to take an aspirin. And when we think about it, if a doctor pulls your tube, you do want to numb yourself or maybe get knocked out. So you are using drugs. Some drugs are good. Cigarettes are not good. They may give you cancer, but that's legal. Drinking, certainly a lot, will kill people on the highways, and you'll beat up your wife, and there are bar fights. Even recreationally, it seems to me, [cannabis] is the lesser of all the evils. I've still never been high, but I'm told it's calming. It doesn't make you want to fight. You just smile like an idiot and gaze off into space. But medicinally there's no argument – it cures all kinds of ailments. Epilepsy. PTSD…

***Classic Rock* is celebrating our twentieth anniversary. How do you feel about our coverage of Kiss over the years?**
It doesn't concern me, really. I guess overall it's okay. I only care if you print the photo, because we listen and perceive things visually. When I was a kid I didn't care what the writer wrote. I just wanted to see the photos. If the only thing you printed were photos, I'd be okay with that. Problem is, most new bands just aren't interesting-looking enough.

Is there anyone else around who you think has got that showmanship?
I think Lady Gaga is the only new rock star in the last twenty years. She's got the goods, she's got the songwriting, she's got the singing. I suggest you go see *A Star Is Born*. If she decides to do a rock band – just her and three or four guys backing her with guitars; fuck the dancers and the disco shit – you would see a legitimate rock star. She's the real deal. The other ones are nice. I like Ariana Grande and Britney Spears. I think they're terrific. But, y'know, there's that cliché – the cliché is you come out and you emphasise the sexuality, the boobs and the butt. That's all great, I'm a fan of that too. Gaga's about more. She's got swagger, if you see what I mean.

How were things going for Kiss back in 1998?
Well it wasn't affecting me, but the cancer that is downloading and file sharing was taking hold and it was killing off new bands. They had to go back to being bricklayers or factory workers, y'know, ethical, hard-working jobs. They couldn't devote enough time to their music and their art because they couldn't earn a living.

If you hate digital platforms so much, how comes Kiss are on Spotify?
You really can't [stop that], because the fans will download and file-share you anyway. And there's very little legal repercussion, because the legislation is not there. Because the legislators have no idea what it means. They'll say: "You have enough money, what are you complaining about?" My response is: 'Bitch, I didn't ask your opinion. I'll let you know when it's enough."

"I'm not the best-looking guy in the world. But when I walk by a mirror, it's difficult for me not to stand in awe of myself."

How did it feel to get the original band back together for 1998's *Psycho Circus*?
Well that wasn't the case, actually. The band got an outside producer, Bruce Fairbairn, and we started recording without Ace and Peter, because they started the lawyer shuffle: I want this, I want more, I want that. And we said: "No. You've been in and out of the band three different times." I don't want to get into it. And I continue to wish Ace and Peter well. Ace is here on the Kiss Kruise along with Bruce Kulick, and they're doing their own sets, and all are welcome. But you cannot rejoin the band. How many chances in life do you get? Y'know, usually when you stick your hand in a fire you'll get burned the first time. Here you get three different chances. You're done. But that doesn't mean I don't wish them well. So by *Psycho Circus* we tried to include them back in but it didn't work, so they only appeared on two or three tracks.

Mental health has been in the headlines this year. What's the secret to your bulletproof self-esteem?
Well, you've got nothing to lose by being confident. You've got everything to lose by not being confident. That beautiful girl sitting over there? You know you're not the best-looking guy in the world. But walk over there, arch your back and wax poetic. All she can say is no. But here's the big secret. There are a lot of girls out there – and some will say yes. If you never try, they all said no. I think people misunderstand my self-confidence. I'm delusionally self-confident. I know I'm not the best-looking guy in the world. But when I walk by a mirror, it's difficult for me not to stand in awe of myself. Even that phrase makes people think: "Oh fuck, you're not supposed to say that about yourself." And my question is: Why not? Look in the mirror and smile and laugh. This is all we've got." ❶

Kiss's End Of The Road world tour reaches the UK in July 2019. More info at kissonline.com

Gene Simmons (probably with mirrors on the inside of his shades as well as the outside) in Toronto, Canada, March 2018.